

Drinking Water Conservation Plan – Frequently Asked Questions

Metro Vancouver's Drinking Water Conservation Plan (DWCP) is a regional policy to manage the use of drinking water during periods of high demand, mostly during late spring to early fall, and during periods of water shortages and emergencies. Municipalities have adopted the DWCP into their bylaws and are responsible for enforcement of the watering regulations. This document addresses frequently asked questions about the DWCP. More information is available at metrovancouver.org by searching 'watering regulations'.

Why do we have watering regulations?

Watering regulations help manage demand for drinking water during the summer, periods of water shortages, and in emergencies. Most precipitation in Metro Vancouver occurs between November and April. Dry summer months lead to an increase in water use, particularly for the outdoor activities that are included in the regulations.

Why do the watering regulations now start on May 1, two weeks earlier than last year?

Activating watering regulations earlier has the potential to delay or avoid moving to higher, more restrictive stages during hot and dry springs or summers. Due to climate change, water conservation is becoming necessary earlier in the year to ensure we have an adequate water supply to meet demand during hot and dry summer months.

Why are watering regulations in effect when rain is still in the forecast, and snowpack and reservoir levels are high?

As of 2018, Stage 1 watering regulations come into effect automatically each year from May 1 to October 15. Activation of the regulations is not adjusted based on current weather or snowpack or reservoir levels. Demand for water typically increases in May, and a consistent activation date encourages water users to develop efficient and effective watering practices, while providing clarity about the regulations' annual implementation. While the reservoirs may be full and spilling during activation of the regulations, sustaining water levels downstream of the reservoirs is important for supporting fish habitat and ecosystems.

What does Stage 1 mean?

Stage 1 regulations are activated automatically every year, from May 1 until October 15. Stage 1 reduces demand for drinking water in the summer months by focusing on efficient watering practices for lawns and gardens.

What are Stages 2 and 3? When do they happen?

Stages 2 and 3 describe further restrictions to limit water use and are likely to be activated during unusually hot and dry conditions to maximize conservation through to early fall with the return of seasonal rainfall or until the water shortage situation is over.

What is Stage 4? When does it happen?

Stage 4 is an emergency stage that limits both indoor and outdoor water uses to ensure an adequate supply of drinking water for human consumption and essential uses such as firefighting. Stage 4 is activated based on the rare occurrence of a significant emergency, such as a major water main break or an earthquake.

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Why have the number of lawn watering days been reduced from three to two days per week under Stage 1 regulations?

Reducing the number of days when lawn watering is permitted enables further water conservation, while still allowing adequate time to maintain a healthy lawn. In general, healthy lawns only need an hour of watering or rain per week.

Why is watering allowed only in the morning?

The regulations have restricted watering to morning hours since 2011. Watering in the morning reduces demand for water in the evenings, when household use is highest for cooking, washing and other domestic uses.

Watering in the morning is also effective in reducing water loss due to evaporation and is the recommended best practice for watering lawns and gardens.

Why is using a sprinkler to water trees, shrubs and flowers restricted to the early morning hours?

Restricting use of a sprinkler to early morning for watering trees, shrubs and flowers reduces the use of water in the afternoons and evenings, when total water demand is highest. It also reduces the amount of water lost to evaporation. Watering by hand, including with a hose and shut-off valve, is more efficient than using a sprinkler, and is allowed any day, any time under Stages 1, 2 and 3. Enforcement of the regulations is also assisted by consistent watering times.

When can I water my vegetable garden?

Watering edible plants is permitted any day, any time under Stages 1, 2 and 3.

I'm treating European Chafer Beetle or have planted a new lawn, which requires more frequent watering. Do the regulations still apply to me?

Watering exemption permits are available from your municipality, and required in order to water outside of the regulations.

Why is watering playing fields and golf courses allowed during hours when watering residential lawns is not?

Sports fields are a public amenity that need to be maintained to remain playable through the summer and in the fall, when the fields are more heavily used again, and to prevent the loss of a public asset. Watering sports fields is restricted to 7pm to 9pm, to prevent mid-day watering when a portion of the water is lost to evaporation.

Sports field and golf course operators are also able to operate under an approved water management plan specific to their site. Water management plans allow operators a flexible and effective mechanism to manage their irrigation demands without negatively impacting playing conditions.

What other uses are included in the regulations?

Other uses of treated drinking water are restricted in various stages, such as the operation of commercial vehicle washes and pools. The full regulations are available at metrovancover.org, by searching 'watering regulations'.